

## Frequently Asked Questions

# For Food Operators and Food Employees: No Bare Hand Contact with Ready-To-Eat Food

### 1. What is ready-to-eat (RTE) food?

RTE food is ready to be consumed and does not require any additional heat treatment steps to make it safe. RTE food may be reheated for aesthetic, culinary, or other reasons. Food that typically should be cooked further to render it safe, such as a rare hamburger, or a sauce containing raw eggs, can also be considered ready-to-eat provided the consumer has been advised of the potential risks and request to eat the food less than thoroughly cooked.

### 2. What are some examples of RTE foods?

RTE foods include:

- Any food that will not be thoroughly cooked or reheated after it is prepared
- Any food item that has already been cooked (e.g., a slice of pizza or a cooked ground meat patty).
- Prepared fresh fruits and vegetables served raw or cooked
- Salads and salad ingredients
- Garnishes such as lettuce, parsley, potato chips or pickles
- Cold meats and sandwiches
- Raw sushi fish and sushi rice
- Bread, toast, rolls and baked goods
- Ice served to the customer
- Dry fermented sausages, salt cured meats and poultry, dried meat and poultry products (e.g. jerky)
- Opened packages of thermally processed low-acid foods that were hermetically sealed.

### 3. What is the danger in “direct hand contact with ready-to-eat food”?

The food that is ready to eat may become contaminated by harmful germs from food handlers' bare hands. The body fluids or particles found on their hands may carry harmful viruses, bacteria, or parasites that can cause foodborne illness; thorough and frequent handwashing can reduce this risk. When food handlers have not washed their hands thoroughly before handling food, harmful germs may be on their hands. When they touch the food with their bare hands, these germs pass from their hands onto the food. Ready-to-eat food is not cooked again before it is eaten, so harmful germs cannot be killed and can cause foodborne illness.

### 4. Are food employees required to wear single-use gloves to handle ready-to-eat foods?

No. CalCode requires that ready-to-eat foods be prepared and served without bare hand contact. Wearing single-use disposable sanitary gloves is one of several acceptable ways to comply with the regulation. If used, single-use gloves shall be used for only one task, such as working with ready-to-eat food or with raw food of animal origin, used for no other purpose, and shall be discarded when damaged or soiled, or when interruptions in food handling occur.

**5. Besides single-use gloves, what other tools can be used to handle ready-to-eat foods?**

Food employees can handle ready-to-eat food without touching it with bare hands by creating a barrier and using any of the following utensils for preparation and service:

- Single-use disposable gloves
- Dispensing equipment (ex., condiment pump, dry food dispensers)
- Forks and spoons
- Tongs
- Scoops
- Spatulas
- Toothpicks
- Bakery and deli wraps
- Waxed paper

**6. When are food employees required to wash their hands?**

- When entering a food preparation area
- Before initially putting on clean, single-use gloves for working with food, and prior to putting on gloves when changing tasks, prior to working with ready-to-eat foods or raw foods, and when damaged or soiled.
- Immediately before engaging in food preparation
- Before handling clean and single-use equipment and utensils
- Before dispensing, serving food, or handling clean tableware and serving utensils in the food service area
- During food preparation, as often as necessary to remove soil and contamination and to prevent cross-contamination when changing tasks
- When changing tasks and switching between handling raw foods and working with ready-to-eat foods
- After using the toilet room
- After touching bare human body parts other than clean hands and clean, exposed portions of arms
- After coughing, sneezing blowing the nose, using tobacco, eating, or drinking
- After handling service animals allowed in a food facility
- After caring for or handling aquatic animals such as molluscan shellfish or crustacean in tanks
- After handling soiled equipment or utensils
- After engaging in other activities that contaminate the hands or gloves

**7. What can a food employee do with a ready-to-eat food item if he/she touched it with bare hands?**

The action taken will depend on the specific situation and type of food. Depending on the food item that was touched with bare hands, a corrective action may be taken, such as cooking or reheating to the proper temperature. Where a corrective action is not feasible the RTE food items touched with bare hands must be discarded.

**8. Can bare hands be used to prepare a food that will be used as an ingredient in a food product that will be cooked prior to serving?**

Yes, bare hand can be used provided that the final food product is heated in accordance with California Health and Safety Code Sections 114004, 114008, 114010, and 114016.

**9. Does the law allow for a variance from the requirement to have no bare hand contact with ready-to-eat food?**

In accordance with CalCode section 113961(f), under limited circumstances, a variance may be requested to have bare hand contact with ready-to-eat foods. Certain practices must be followed, including, identification of foods touched by bare hands; documentation of employee training in proper handwashing and prevention of cross-contamination; a written health plan; and documentation that employees use added measures to prevent contamination. If you would like more information regarding this, please contact the Environmental Health Division Consultative Services at (626) 430-5320.

**10. Are food handlers required to use gloves to wrap leftover food that has been served to a consumer and that the consumer desires to take home?**

No. CalCode does not require gloves to be worn to wrap leftovers, but it does require that food that has been served to a consumer and then wrapped or packaged at the direction of the consumer be handled only with utensils and that these utensils are properly sanitized before reuse. In lieu of utensils, food workers can use single-use gloves to wrap leftover food.

**For the complete text of Assembly Bill 1252, go to [http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill\\_id=201320140AB1252](http://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201320140AB1252) on the California Legislative Information website.**

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